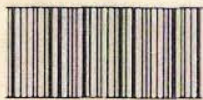


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THE GROWTH OF THE BELGIAN NATION

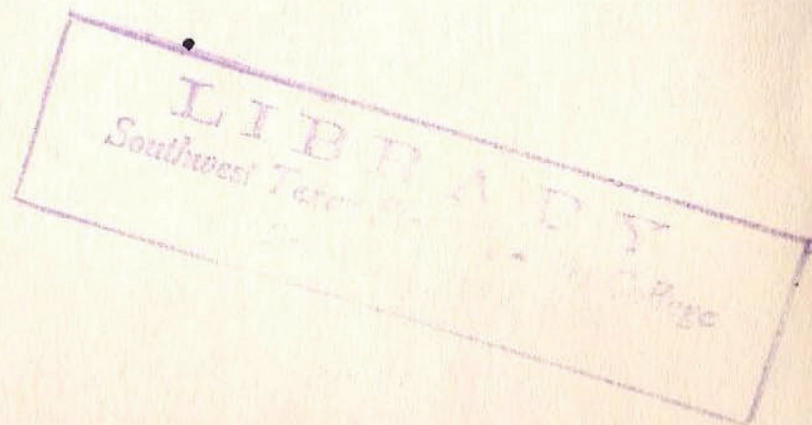
by
JAN-ALBERT GORIS



THE GROWTH OF THE BELGIAN NATION

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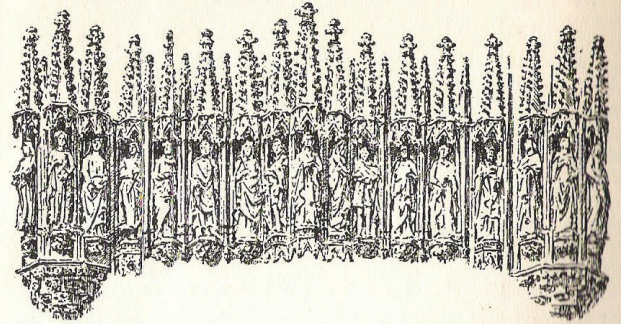


BELGIAN GOVERNMENT INFORMATION CENTER
630 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 20, N. Y.
1946

The author, Dr. Jan-Albert Goris, has published a number of books on historical, artistic and literary subjects in Dutch, French and English.

He taught Economic History at Louvain University (Belgium).

His publications in English are: *Belgium in Bondage* (Fischer, New York, 1943), *Strangers Should Not Whisper* (Fischer, New York, 1945), *Belgium* (University of California Press, 1945), *Belgian Letters* (New York, 1946).



IT is not the author's intention here to write a strictly chronological history of Belgium from the time of its existence as an independent nation, — that is, since 1830.

It is impossible to understand as complicated and delicately constituted an organism as Belgium without going back to the very origin of the different institutions governing its existence, without familiarizing oneself with the diverse spiritual adventures which determined its real character.

The political personality of Belgium, the justification for its existence as a separate state, as a sovereign entity, is not to be attributed, as some observers have claimed, solely to the will of its great and powerful neighbors, nor to the machinations of those who tried to establish a bal-

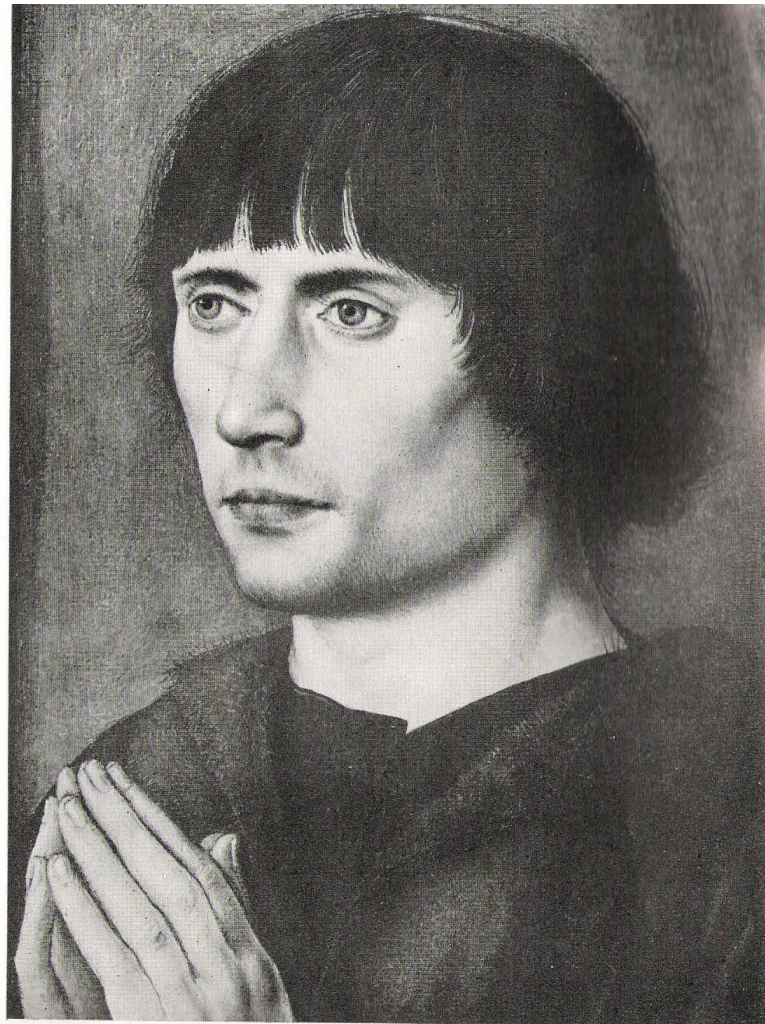
ance of power in Europe. It is determined by causes much more profound, which to many investigators have remained lost in time.

A French author once described the fatherland as "a mode of life on which we all agree." Starting from this principle and applying it in its strictest sense — that is of course, falsifying it — some polemic writers have gone so far as to claim that Belgium is after all only a geographical expression and that it exhibits no sign of that cohesion which is the secret of the existence and endurance of a nation.

There is some excuse for this error: present-day Belgium, to the objective observer, sometimes takes on the appearance of a political paradox. Emphasis has been unduly placed on the impressive number of contradictions in its material and spiritual makeup, on the fact that the country is composed of two ethnic or "racial" groups which at first sight have nothing in common and whose internal discrepancies would seem to lead them inevitably into conflict. On the one hand is a population of Germanic origin and language, occupying the entire northern part of the country, on the other, a group just as important, of Latin origin and language, of a different sensibility, of a cast of mind almost the opposite in many respects to that of its northern neighbors.

It has been pointed out that this borderland should be cut in two and that a definite frontier should separate these two groups — the Germanic and the Latin elements — rather than letting a "no man's land" grow up between the great neighboring countries where the two elements

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The People Who Made Belgium. A young man, with the typical haircut of the fifteenth century. Times were troubled, people were either rich or miserable. This man evidently was well off, self-confident and strong-minded.

H. Van der Goes, Portrait of a Priest (?)
Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, R. I.



The People Who Made Belgium. A middle-aged woman of the fifteenth century. Stern, solid, tight-lipped, a representative of the well-to-do bourgeoisie of the Burgundian period.

Hans Memling. Portrait of an old woman.
The Museum of Fine Arts of Houston, Texas.

constantly merge so that the racial and linguistic characteristics tend to shade off and even to disappear.

It has also been brought out that there is a great contrast between the industrial and hilly country of the Ardennes and Hainaut, given over completely from the Middle Ages on to industry, metallurgy, and increasingly industrialized in the course of the nineteenth century, and the flat Flemish country, devoted almost entirely to agriculture and its concomitant industries, weaving and tapestry making.

The differences in the mental orientation of the inhabitants of these two regions have also been dwelt upon. The so-called lightness or fickleness of the Walloons and of the people of Liège in particular, their musical sense, have been opposed to the so-called mysticism and the melancholy of the Brabantine and Flemish people. Whenever international events or the repercussions of internal politics bring out these contrasts and apparent oppositions, it is curious to note that in spite of fairly violent conflagrations, Belgium has always manifested its ardent desire to be itself, to continue to exist, and has always proclaimed that its present state of absolute sovereignty was the result of a centuries-old evolution, expressing finally the duality in which resides its strength and power.

But to comprehend all that, to prevent the spectator's confusion before the many diverse elements whose contrast was greatly exaggerated during the nationalistic fever which has raged in Europe since the Romantic era, Belgium must be continually explained by its past.

In studying this history, one is more and more con-

vinced that all these different elements have been converging for centuries toward a single end, that all these contradictions have been gathered into a bundle of forces which makes of the nine provinces of Belgium a real unity.

To sketch the broad outlines of this development, one must start with the physical aspect of Belgium, its mass, its territorial formation.

In the beginning it was certainly only a geographical expression. When Caesar conquered *Gallia Belgica*, there was no more unity among the local clans in this ill-defined territory than there was fifty years ago among the Negro tribes of the Congo. After the conquest the Romans, aware of the strategic position of these provinces, grouped them into three regions: Lower Germany and First and Second Belgium. Under Clovis Belgium was a part of France and was considered as a borderland. The Belgians were spoken of as the "extremi hominum" (the farthest off men).

In 843 the Treaty of Verdun cut the territory longitudinally. It separated the East from the West, thereby accentuating the formation of Flanders as an independent entity, absorbing moreover a good part of French Belgium in the orbit of the future Lotharingia.

In the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Belgian communes of the East and the West made feeble attempts at political and economic rapprochement, by means of various treaties and agreements.

Under the Dukes of Burgundy the two parts were finally reunited. Belgium of the Grand Dukes of the West extended from Frisia to Champagne and even took

in a good part of Burgundy. Under Charles V Flanders had regained some of the territories which had been cut off in the wars against the French overlords. They were lost again under the Spanish and the Austrian régime, after Flanders was split off from the provinces of the Low Countries. In the nineteenth century Flanders was briefly reunited with Holland and after a few lesser amputations, it assumed its present shape.

During the four years' fighting of the first World War, Belgium was reduced to a strip of land behind the Yser. It was enlarged by the restitution of the territories of Eupen-Malmédy, accorded it in the Versailles Peace Treaty.

Belgium has never manifested any territorial ambitions. It is well known that there are several thousand French in the North of France who still speak a Flemish dialect. Dunkirk used to be a Flemish city. And Belgium is well aware that in 1919 some muddle-heads expressed annexationist views with regard to certain Dutch territories. Good sense, however, relegates all this to manifestations of national folklore and assigns these irredentist dreams to the domain of rhetoric and not to that of politics. So Belgium is satisfied with its frontiers. Its 8,360,000 inhabitants agree on a mode of life which is not that of the French, nor that of the English, nor even that of the Dutch, and it goes without saying, they do not accept that of the Germans.

What were the broad outlines of Belgium's political evolution which may explain its orientation in modern times? At what moment did it become conscious of its

unity, of the necessity of its existence? We must guard against the tendency to attribute our latter-day ideas to the men of the past. This is a great danger for the historian. The idea of national consciousness was awakened very slowly in the minds of the popular masses. In the remote Middle Ages they paid allegiance to the Abbey or the local chief who offered them protection. After this they owed their loyalty and obedience to the feudal lord. They were associated little or not at all with the political life of the country to which they belonged. They were not even called upon to defend it with arms. Not until the rise of the Communes did they become conscious of their dignity as citizens.

Belgian political life must be explained by the local patriotism which dates from the thirteenth century and which has never been under the sway of a centralizing state control; but during the period of the Communes, in spite of violent clashes and fratricidal struggles, the cities occasionally realized that their aspirations were identical, they strove somewhat obscurely to solidify their interests.

When the cities of Ghent and Bruges fought against their sovereign, against the nobility, the common people of Liège sent hundreds of cartloads of wheat to support the good cause. The cities came closer together; far-sighted leaders, such as Jacob van Artevelde, inaugurated a policy of rapprochement and even tried to unify or co-ordinate the institutions, the commercial practices, the mediums of exchange.

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The People Who Made Belgium. A young man, long-nosed, slant-eyed, a realist who definitely refuses to be a sucker. His best felt hat on, he looks into the future with confidence, and three hundred years later we meet his sly look and self-assured air.

Joos van Cleve, the Elder, Portrait of a man.
John G. Johnson Art Collection, Philadelphia.



The People Who Made Belgium. An old peasant woman of the sixteenth century. A clean-cut, intelligent and humorous face. She holds a beer mug with the same tenderness a farmer's wife would hold a mug of applejack.

While France was rapidly being centralized and oriented toward a régime of absolute power, the Flemish and Walloon provinces were systematically consolidating the rights they had acquired. They were as different from the solidly united bloc which France presented at this time as they were from the German chaos beyond the Rhine, — a chaos which fortunately was still to last for several centuries.

Through a policy of conquests, pacts, and intermarriages, the Dukes of Burgundy first and Charles V afterward reassembled the Belgian provinces. Although they respected to a degree the individual rights of the Cities and Communes, they forced them to accept certain unifying principles which served as a basis for the later political unity of Belgium.

Whenever the Belgian provinces opposed their sovereign, they almost always acted by common consent. Belgium as a political entity was born in 1429; national feeling began to develop in the course of the fifteenth century and became a reality in the sixteenth, when William of Orange and his friends first employed the expression "the common Fatherland" to designate all the provinces of the Low Countries. Since then there has been no further question of separation or division, the political unity of Belgium has not been a moot point, except when the influence of linguistic nationalism made itself felt in the nineteenth century.

The political conception which governs a State is naturally made up of many constituent elements of the

national life. It is the expression of the character, the multiple aspirations of a people. When the United States wrote down in their Declaration of Independence that man has a right to happiness, or rather to the pursuit of happiness, they manifested thereby their fundamental optimism, whose guises are manifold and striking. The Frenchmen of the eighteenth century guaranteed nothing of the kind, but established, with the juridical sense which is peculiar to them, the "Rights of Men and Citizens." Literature, art, a certain cast of mind led to this conclusion, a logical result of the evolution of thought in a country as in love with logic as with liberty.

Does Belgium's intellectual life, as evidenced in its bicephalous literature, furnish arguments which prove that a spiritual unity has been built up in the course of the last five or six centuries? At first glance, no. In the Middle Ages, of course, the predominance of Latin was for a long time a unifying element. In the era of Humanism too, some of the great minds in both parts of the country used a universal mode of expression. Then for a very brief period French, as everywhere else in Europe, was the language of learning and elegance. But from the thirteenth century on there have been in Belgium two distinct and parallel literatures,—to use this word in its largest sense—one in Dutch, the other in French.

There has lately been a tendency to represent these two spiritual activities as taking place in watertight compartments. To say that the complete dissimilarity between the Germanic and Latin tongues necessarily implies profound and essential differences between the peoples

who speak them is too facile a conclusion. It has been claimed that language is the supreme criterion of a nation. We know for sure that language is not necessarily an element of unity. It was an English author who good-humoredly observed one day that England and America are separated by the same language. By the same token one could say that the two parts of Belgium are united by two different languages. We are confronted here by a linguistic osmosis, each language in turn equalizing the concentration of the other. But it is equally true that the part of Belgium which at the present time is considered as the most distinctly Latin, the former Principality of Liège, belonged up to the eighteenth century to the Germanic Empire and inevitably had frequent intellectual contacts with its neighbors from beyond the Rhine, while East and West Flanders have been continuously attracted and influenced by the spiritual life of France.

It is also significant that the Principality of Liège included at one time 22 "good towns," 11 of which used French, and 11 Flemish.

The French influence was preponderant in the didactic Flemish literature of the Middle Ages. The impressive mystic writings and popular poetry are almost the only branches which defy a search for their spiritual paternity. Doubtless Flanders' share, whether or not it was the original one in the creation of this literature, was more considerable than that of the French provinces of Belgium, but as early as the fifteenth century numerous writers born in Flanders expressed themselves in French. Froissart was raised in Belgium; Commynes, one of the

greatest of French medieval writers was Flemish, and Chastellain, the excellent chronicler, apologizes profusely for using French instead of his native idiom.

In the sixteenth century, when the whole Flemish country was going tooth and nail to produce a rhetorical literature which makes very depressing reading, the poets Philippe de Maldeghem, Philippe de Decker, and the most celebrated, the most Rabelaisian and the most gifted of them all, Philippe de Marnix de Ste. Aldegonde, continued imperturbably the tradition of "fransquillonism" (upholding of the French language and culture), to which such illustrious writers as Maeterlinck and Verhaeren were later on to give an extraordinary luster. It is not to be gainsaid that these writers contributed to welding together the Belgian soul. They were not deserters, traitors to their mother country, any more than the painters Van der Weyden, or de la Pasture — we are not sure which we should call him — and Patinier of Dinant whose name is rarely pronounced in the French way, were deserters from their Walloon origins.

In the interest of nationalism, philologists will still quarrel for years over whether the motif of *Reynard the Fox*, the Flemish version of which is the best preserved, was borrowed from Germany or from France, whether the theme of *Elckerlyc* (*Everyman*) in its authoritative Dutch form is due to England or to Pieter of Diest. But, leaving these intellectual pastimes to the philologists, it is more likely that a stranger, regarding objectively the literature of the Belgians, will be a better judge than they of whether or not this is a typical national Belgian literature.

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The People Who Made Belgium. A solid burgheress of the sixteenth century. Few things in life could upset the balance between her senses and her reason. Hard work has given her security and established her in material affluence.

G. Massijs, *Portrait of a lady*. Detail. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



The People Who Made Belgium. A young lawyer of the seventeenth century. Clear-eyed with full sensual lips, an intelligent high forehead and a certain melancholy softness in the expression.

P. P. Rubens. Portrait of his brother Philippe. Detail.
Detroit Institute of Arts.

In the period of the great nationalistic fever, those authors who made a choice between the two languages employed in Belgium or who used first one and then the other, were considered as traitors to their linguistic community, as "denationalized." Maeterlinck was spoken of in these terms, and yet when he is mentioned in Anglo-Saxon countries or elsewhere, he is almost always described as "the Fleming of the Flemings." The chief work of De Coster, *Tyl Ulenspiegel*, had a curious fate in this respect. Written by an author who hardly knew Flemish, it is everywhere taken for a Flemish work and it reflects so well the Belgian national sensibility that very few critics in the United States and England realize that it was written in French. It should also be emphasized that the bible of the Flemish revival in the nineteenth century, *The Lion of Flanders*, was written by Henri Conscience, the son of a French worker who had come to Antwerp to aid in the construction of the fleet with which Napoleon intended to undertake the invasion of Great Britain.

In Belgian literature, Flemish as well as French, there is a whole section which exalts the love of the soil, which is inspired by folklore, which depicts rural life, provincial existence, with its littleness, its somewhat irritating "Gemütlichkeit." It is identical in Flanders and Walonia; one of the best examples of this type of writing is the long novel, *Jean Clarambaux*, by Jean Tousseul, the scene of which, but for a few details, might have been laid in Flanders as well as in the valley of the Semois.

In spite of the linguistic barrier, an identical sensibility asserts itself in both parts of the country, a sensibility

quite distinct from that which characterizes the intellectual activity of France and Holland. The French easily recognize a Belgian book, even shorn of Belgicisms; the Dutch recognize a Flemish work, even written in the purest Dutch. For when peculiarities of language are missing, still the national spirit shows through, the savor of the Flemish soil, of the lovely Walloon countryside gives off its aroma in spite of an increasing trend toward writing of an international character.

A similar striking resemblance, a similar identity may be found in the evolution of art in Belgium. The plastic art of Wallonia is sometimes a little more sharply linear than that of Flanders; Flemish painting is dominated more by an obsession with color. Here too, however, there are exchanges, reciprocal influences which very often make it impossible to distinguish the schools or to guess the origin of the artists or the works. It is difficult to avoid being self-persuaded in interpreting this matter.

Let us go on to another distinctive element of the Belgian nationality whose origin may be traced far back in Belgian history.

Part of the Middle Ages was dominated by the problem of the investitures, by the question of which came first in this world, the religious or the civil power. This was not merely a question of international public law, a question of precedence between the Pope and the Emperor. It was a reflection of the profound spiritual conflict which obsessed the hearts and minds of all the people in medieval times. Was the world a theocracy sub-

mitted to the absolute authority of the Church, or ought the two powers to coexist, with a strict limitation as to their respective domains? Finally, should there be a complete separation between the spiritual and temporal worlds?

During the long years of this quarrel which inflamed all of Europe, Belgium played a very modest role. Either the country was on the side of the temporal power or it pursued an opportunistic policy, an attitude which stems from the temporal camp.

The Dukes of Brabant especially distinguished themselves by playing now the Emperor's card and now the Pope's, with utter detachment and cynicism. At that epoch this corresponded to the general sentiment of the Belgians, who had settled the question in their heart.

The Middle Ages solved the problem by the use of force, but the Renaissance and the Reformation gave this solution a philosophical justification: this was the rise of liberalism which signifies tolerance and liberty of conscience.

In the great neighboring countries, France, England, the Germanic Empire, conflicts over dogma were solved by radical solutions ascribable to Catholic or Protestant fanaticism. At this time the Belgian provinces demonstrated their capacity for liberalism; they had only to call upon a long tradition. The relations between the Church and the laity, the Belgian bourgeois, have always been imbued with a lively anticlericalism. All the vulgar literature, all of the popular theater (there was scarcely any other, moreover) of the Middle Ages is full of at-

tacks against the ministers of the Church, while respect for the dogma remained unaltered. The priest and the monk are often covered with ridicule, but the structural tenets, the prestige of the Church as an institution, is never assailed.

In the organization of business the role of the Church was much more restricted than in centralized countries where the State leaned on the Church and professed to be its servant. The Belgian communes had fought to obtain their civil independence. They were naturally wary of the churchmen who would have liked to transform their urban democracy into a City of God, according to the ideas of St. Augustine. This state of mind explains the attitude taken by the cities of Antwerp, Ghent, Liège and Namur, when Charles V and Philip II in their efforts to exercise a centralizing power, tried to enforce their religious edicts against the heretics in these cities: they conscientiously sabotaged the will of the Prince.

Antwerp, which at that time set the tone not only for Belgium but for a good part of western Europe, practiced a policy of passive resistance which for 50 years succeeded in saving the commercial and financial prosperity of this great port, this huge money mart. Thanks to this spirit of inaction, it was within the walls of Antwerp that the excessively rigid scholastic morality was battered by all the forces of rising modern capitalism.

It is true that to cover up their maneuverings and their often disgraceful speculations, the financiers and merchants of Antwerp addressed themselves to the theologians of Paris and Cologne, in order to ask these latter

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The People Who Made Belgium. A young housewife of the seventeenth century. Big-eyed, full-mouthed, handsome and convivial. A decade later she will have developed a double chin and raised a big and happy family.

P. P. Rubens (doubtful attribution). Detail of *The Master and his Wife*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.



The People Who Made Belgium. The full-moon face, the heavy lips, betray the characteristics usually attributed to the Flemish burghers of yore, as well as to their descendants. This man was probably an architect.

Pieter Franchois. Portrait of a man, Detail.
E. H. Fisher Gallery, University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

questions to clear their conscience. They demanded to know whether such and such a speculation on the stock market was morally permissible, whether wagers on the sex of children to be born were ethical, whether one might charge interest on a loan, whether maritime insurance was proper.

The bankers and financiers knew that the theologians would invariably answer "no" to all these questions, and so they continued unconcernedly to go on with their capitalistic dealings while waiting without impatience for a reply they could guess.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Belgium's intellectual life was dominated entirely by Jesuit influence. The liberty and the dogmatic and moral intellectual anarchy of the sixteenth century were replaced by the strict discipline of Loyola. Without casting aspersions on the merit of the Bollandists, it must be admitted that, except in the artistic realm, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries produced very few interesting things in Belgium. A hodge-podge of sanctimonious writings remains. A dull and sickeningly sweet devotional literature, a theater which would be best forgotten. It is impossible to attribute this barrenness, this intellectual aridity, solely to the economic humiliation which Belgium experienced during this period. It is certain that the absolute control by the Church of the intellectual life and the moral atmosphere — a violent reaction to the abuses which had characterized the sixteenth century — plus the economic isolation and the political mediocrity from which Belgium suffered at that time, narrowed the mental horizon of the

population for 200 years. The best proof of this is what took place in Belgium in the nineteenth century. Then an imposing parallelism developed, in Flanders as well as Wallonia, a cultural life which, although respecting the moral sense and the religious convictions of the people, permitted the expression of a genius and sensibility peculiarly Belgian, in a way which provoked echoes in Europe and throughout the world.

Liberal ideas gave to intellectual life in Belgium the same vigor, the same force, as in the sixteenth century. The bigoted Catholicism of the seventeenth century was transformed, as François Mauriac nicely put it, into a "Catholicism with all its teeth."

The Walloons are supposed to be less prone to Catholic orthodoxy than the Flemings. A certain Voltairian tradition is said to exist in Wallonia, which differentiates it from the northern part of the country. It is true that the rapid and thorough industrialization of the Walloon provinces in the nineteenth century had as a consequence a more liberal attitude in regard to the Church, and in some circles even led to an aggressive anti-religious feeling. But skepticism and rationalism in religious affairs are as common in Flanders as in Wallonia, and it is not possible to find an essential difference between the two sections of the country in this respect.

Ever since the last century there has been a concerted attempt to explain all the historical phases of a country by economic motives. This factor had been neglected. The historical method had been based on the study of battles, of dynasties, of politics. It took time for the man

in the street and for the rustic to invade the scene and capture the attention of the historian. When it was finally realized that Plutarch was mistaken, that it is the great popular currents which decide the fate of nations, that the constants in the physical makeup of a country are the final determinants of its destiny, it was also discovered that the economy is one of these constants, and its importance was of course immediately exaggerated. Man does not act solely through motives of self-interest, but is influenced by many different elements; neither does a country permit its conduct to be dictated by its material interests alone. But the economic motive exists and it must be taken into account. What part has it played in the making of Belgium? Has it contributed to its consolidation, or has it retarded the formation of this unity? Have the salient characteristics of this economy changed much in the course of centuries?

It is well known that Belgium is essentially a converting country: it imports raw materials, works on them and exports them. This situation is not the result of the economic development of just the last century. In 1297 the Count of Flanders, Guy de Dampierre, wrote to the King of France: "The prosperity of the County of Flanders, whose economy is not self-sufficient, derives from the merchandise which it is the custom to import there from all parts of the world, by land and by sea."

The Belgians have understood that this is the basis of their material existence. They have fought, they have revolted, to preserve this economic life line. They have won their case. In the thirteenth century the basic ec-

onomic aspect of Belgium was therefore no different from its present one: at that time it was necessary to import wool to Flanders, copper and steel to Wallonia. It still is.

When the cities, the duchies, the counties got together, they put forward economic motives. In 1339 Flanders concluded a treaty with Brabant in which Hainaut later joined. In the preliminary remarks which introduced the text, the following is given as the reason for the treaty: "Whereas the two countries are inhabited by a considerable number of people who can sustain themselves only by commerce and industry." This agreement established a common currency and a court of arbitration, and provided for still other arrangements, too long to enumerate.

Belgium is known in the twentieth century as a land of experiment, a place where modern economy is seeking its way. There too history is just repeating itself. Between 1500 and 1570 Belgium in its entirety, and especially the city of Antwerp, was the trying ground for all the adventurers, all the enterprising spirits, all the great financiers and industrialists of Europe. It was there that modern capitalism first joined in battle.

If it has been possible to look upon Belgium as a land of experiment for out and out industrialism and unbridled economic liberalism, this was due to a secular tradition of which the sixteenth century furnished the most telling example. Each time in Belgium's history that the political situation has freed the country of lets and hindrances, each time that Belgium could carry on its commercial and industrial activity with complete liberty, it

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The People Who Made Belgium. A young housewife, gay, lively, good-natured and too well fed. Fine jewels prove her wealth. She was the wife of a prosperous, successful man, P. P. Rubens.

P. P. Rubens. Portrait of his first wife. Detail.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.



The People Who Made Belgium. An elegant gentleman of the seventeenth century. Only the costume and the hairdo had changed. Times were not so brilliant. International politics were playing havoc in Belgium. This Cavalier faces the circumstances with equanimity.

Jacob van Oost, Portrait of a Cavalier, Detail.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.

set the world an example and sometimes even took the lead.

Belgium is a crossroads of Europe—geographically, politically, economically. It has been so since Roman days and the course of time has served only to accentuate this feature. Train routes, motor highways often follow the old Roman roads. Neither protectionist tariffs nor the many obstacles to the free circulation of merchandise erected by Belgium's neighbors have been able to turn Belgium aside from its natural and historic role: to be a land of exchange, a country of fairs, of international markets, for the barter of goods as well as money.

Belgium has also at all times evinced a spirit of expansion. Although the Belgians have occasionally been reproached for being stay-at-home folks, history seems to contradict this accusation. A few years after Caesar conquered Belgium, Walloon soldiers were fighting in the ranks of the Roman legions. Later they took part in all the big European battles, during the wars of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Considerable numbers of Flemings and Walloons followed William the Conqueror to England, and later the weavers of Flanders settled in Great Britain by thousands. There were Belgian migrations to Pomerania, Silesia, Hungary. And at the time of the great voyages of exploration and discovery, natives of Ghent peopled the "Flemish Isles" which later were called the Azores. But at the time when Belgium was cut off from access to the sea, the Belgians did not give up their urge for expansion. They founded the Ostend Company which, in spite of the formidable re-

sistance of all the European powers, set up trading stations in Canton, Gabelon and on the Coromandel Coast.

In the nineteenth century there was a series of colonial expeditions, mostly unsuccessful. The Belgians settled on the Nunez River in 1841; they went to Guatemala; they were in Brazil. If these attempts at colonization were not very auspicious, it was otherwise with the purely financial and industrial expansion. The branching out of Belgium's capital and industry in the nineteenth century in Russia, in the Far East, in the Near East and in South America was tremendous.

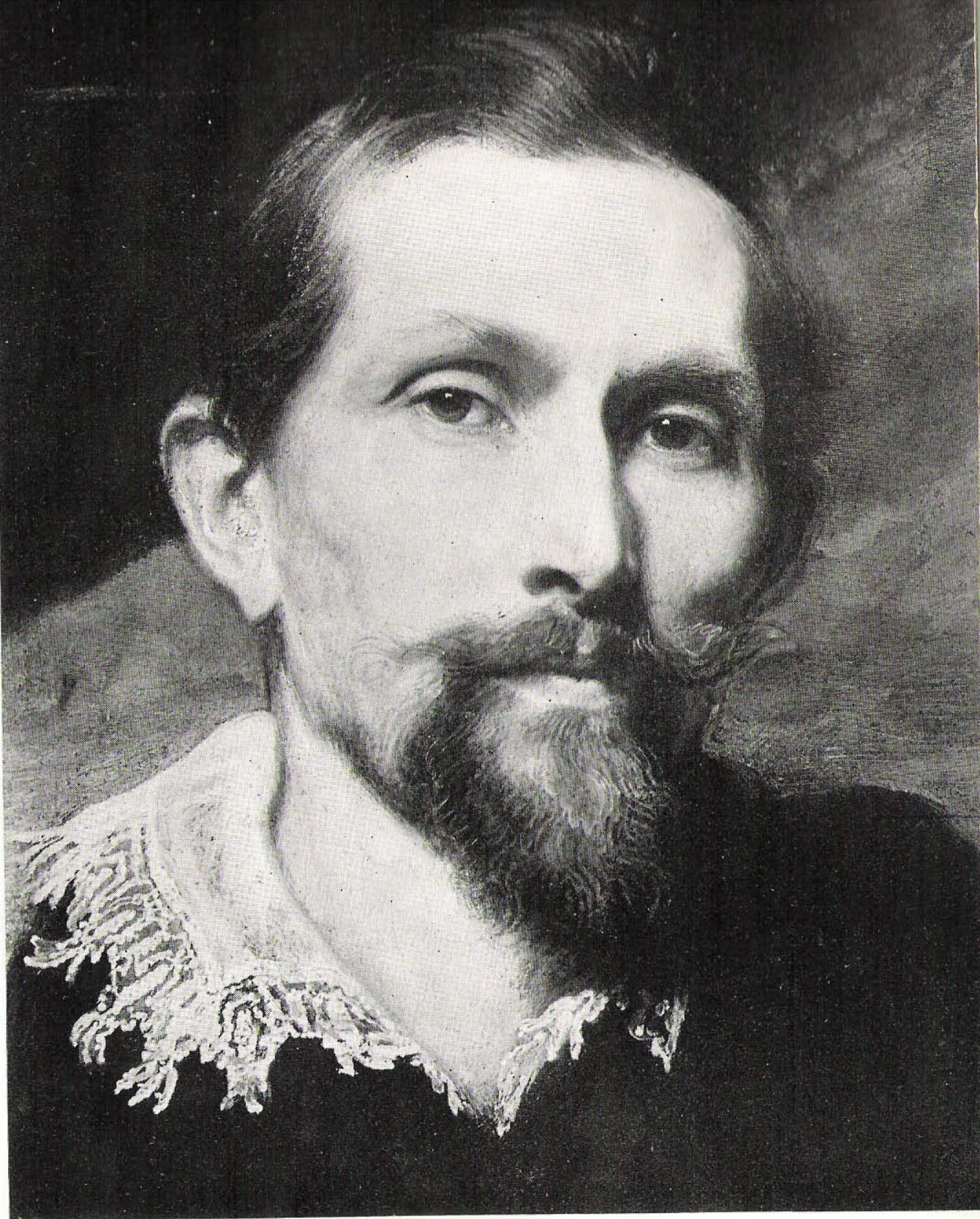
Later on this need for expansion by a country as overpopulated as Belgium found a wonderful outlet in the superb colonial domain due to Leopold II. Thus in every manifestation of its economic life, Belgium has apparently followed for hundreds of years a logical course, on the one hand determined by the close-knit cohesion among the various provinces of the country and on the other regulated by the geographical situation of the country and by the constant factors referred to above. In this domain too then, as in all the others, it would seem that the explanation for the present is to be found in the past, and even in the remote past.

In this rapid survey, which is perhaps a rather abrupt synthesis, an attempt has been made to underline the traits which prove that the Belgium existing today is the result of a long evolution. This growth may have proceeded with temporary interruptions, even deviations, but it resumed its course, it continued and finally achieved success. After discouraging political and economic set-

backs, Belgium has become what it had to be, what it was in its nature to be: a sovereign entity with a character of its own, with a very particular role in the European scene.

During the worst of its reverses, its enemies rendered it a signal service. In 1715 the great powers, without consulting Belgium or taking its needs into account, concluded the Treaty of the Barrier. This treaty was designed to humiliate Belgium, to keep it in a state of servitude and inferiority. In their thoughtless zeal, however, the powers wrote in a phrase which was of prophetic significance. As a matter of fact, they wrote in the introduction to the Treaty of the Barrier that Belgium would be for all time to come: "one single, indivisible, and inalienable domain."

History shows that in spite of oppositions, contradictions, reverses, even of outside influences, Belgium has always been and intends to remain in Europe "one single, indivisible, and inalienable domain."



The People Who Made Belgium. A long-faced gentleman of the seventeenth century. Refined, talented, a lover of life and good fare, one of the outstanding artists of his time.

A. van Dyck. Portrait of Frans Snyders. Detail.
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The People Who Made Belgium. A husband, a wife, a child with her lollypop in the seventeenth century. The quiet dignity, the intimate happiness of everyday people in their Sunday best. They made their country what it is today.

Cornelia de Vos, Family Group.
Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio.

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